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Democratization of Information in West Africa: Exploring a New Form of Mobile Journalism

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Abstract

In French-speaking African countries, especially in West Africa, the press and journalists have been the direct actors in a radical break in the social and political order. Media played a major role in large-scale popular mobilization of unprecedented events. In African countries in general, the wave of democratic transitions gave rise to more or less important compromises and adjustments. In fact, in a democratic society, the media have a public role that they mainly play in questioning governmental actions (Bennet, 2005). This type of journalism is proving to be a valuable instrument for making politics accountable for their actions, guaranteeing the correct use of public funds, preserving public security, denouncing false statements and protecting democracy itself, at different levels of the State, against various forms of private and public corruption. From the Ivory Coast in 2011, to Togo recently in 2020, passing through Senegal in 2012, Burkina Faso in 2014, Benin in 2016, and even the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019; the new media were a real tool for dethroning important political figures. These new media, especially Mobile Journalism, have animated democratic movements particularly in West Africa. Thus, this explorative study goes beyond the decisive role of mobile journalism in the rise of awareness in West African society to consider the challenges, the obstacles and to make some suggestions for the well-establishment of innovative journalistic approaches in the continent. Today, citizen journalism continuously occupies a privileged role in West African context. This article explores a new form of Mobile Journalism in Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) and Burkina Faso, symbolizing a sort of democratization of information in West Africa. Consequently, focus group interviews with mobile journalism's audience, discussions with media group managers, mobile journalists, as well as media regulatory body representatives have been conducted in order to get the opinions about the difficulties encountered.

Keywords: *Mobile Journalism, Mobile flash news, Sidwaya Mobile, FratMat Mobile, West Africa*

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century is indisputably the century of digital communication (Ouedraogo, 2020). We are living in a digital era of digital natives. There is no way-out but to sleep and wake up with information emanating from computers, IPads, smartphones and televisions. Hence, using smartphones, IPads, computers, or at least watching TV has become a discipline, a culture, even an instinct for millions of people around the world. Most often, there is nothing but images

devoid of depth, coherence, and originality. And human mind, like a black box, wittingly or unwittingly, consciously or unconsciously is perpetually consuming these digital contents.

This state of fact is incontestably due to the development of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Everything is essentially based on the use of these new ICTs. It means that without these new technologies nothing can be relevantly possible in terms of dissemination of information. Especially in West African context, new media have generated new methods of disseminating information, giving unprecedented power of expression to citizens. This power of expression is in line with the Charter of Munich, which promotes the right to public information (Munich, 1971). For the French author Francis Balle, the right to information demands for all citizens the possibility of access to all types of digital contents (Balle, 1998).

One of the fundamental criteria of democracy is the freedom of speech (1948)[1]. This freedom is highlighted above all by the freedom granted to the media. This freedom has been consolidated with the multiplicity of new media outlets (YouTube channels, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) and the rise of new forms of journalism such as Mobile Journalism. The popularity of traditional media tends to diminish with the advent of digital media, which reduces the time and cost of accessing information (Ouedraogo, 2020). Although radio has long been a seductive instrument of communication, today, apart from television, it is the new media that gives journalism all its acclaim. Today, it is not an exaggeration to say that Mobile journalism or citizen journalism more generally is the best means of media communication for millions of people around the world. Faced with this situation, it is necessary for the new generation of journalists and communicators to innovate in order to continue to build an audience identity, but also to adapt their products (information in terms of commodity) to the new behaviors of the general audience, consumer of media news.

The appearance of mobile phone in the domain of journalism, few years ago in West Africa, offered new possibilities to media professionals. One of the innovative possibilities is the instantaneous dissemination of information in the form of mobile flash news. However, this new method of dissemination of information adopted by some West African media groups raises some fundamental questions: Is that a real democratization of information for the benefit of the public? What are the benefits and disadvantages of this new informative approach for users in West African context? These different questions will certainly find answers in this paper.

2. Media Landscape in West Africa

Press freedom, access to information and the plurality of the media landscape are advancing at several speeds in West Africa. According to the 2018 world press freedom, the quality of press freedom has significantly increased particularly in three West African countries: Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde and Ghana. These countries have achieved similar or better results than many African countries. They have moved up in the standings and benefit from a plural media landscape. Elsewhere in West Africa, a new era for freedom of expression finally came to Gambia a year after the departure of President Yahya Jammeh who put an end to 22 years of authoritarian regime. Journalists are no longer executed; new private media channels and new online media have sprung up, and the government is working on legal reform to ensure freedom of expression and access to information (Bationo, 2019). At the bottom of the rankings, Mali, Nigeria and Chad still face difficulties related to the safety of journalists and censorship.

More generally, the media explosion of the late 1980s and the movement for democratic reforms in Africa transformed the African media landscape (Breton and Proulx, 1996). It ended the monopoly of governments, paving the way for media pluralism. Overnight, independent media exploded and newspapers appeared on the streets of African capitals, breaking de facto the silence.

It is appropriate to remind that at the dawn of African independences, most newspapers were owned by private (often European) capital or, sometimes, linked to national political movements (Helmore, 1995). Hence, in the 1970s, the majority of newsworthy newspapers were owned by governments. Any newspaper expressing independent editorial positions was subject to censorship or prohibition, and media professionals were occasionally persecuted.

In a few countries (Gambia, Niger), the first daily newspapers appeared during the period of liberalization and the media explosion (Agnes, 2008). Liberian journalist Kenneth Best created the first daily newspaper in Liberia in 1981 and the first Gambian daily newspaper in 1992.

In the 1990s, independent media exploded. In 2006, according to a study conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), West African countries had more than 5,000 professional media including newspapers,

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[1]   Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Articles 3 and 4 ; Available Online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_Translations/eng.pdf

radio stations and television channels. More specifically, the rise of private and independent radio stations has threatened to eclipse public sector radio stations (Mucchielli, 2006). Across the continent, due to the Internet, the advent of digital media and mobile journalism are adding a new wind to conventional media. This diversified the sources of information both for media consumers and producers. Today, 20 years after this media explosion, Eritrea is the only country in sub-Saharan Africa where the government continues to exercise complete control over the media (Freedom House, 2017).

3. Media Whirlwind Reforms in West Africa

With the wind of democratization which blew on the African continent in the 1990s, the rulers undertook the restructuring of the public media to adapt them to the changing political and socioeconomic context, as well as to the emergence of private competition (Ossama, 2001). These reforms included the revision of management methods, the dismissal of part of the staff, a change in the statutes and the efforts to renew the editorial lines. The aim of this triple economic, editorial and legal transformation was to transform public or governmental media into "public service media". The aim was to promote media outlets whose contents met the needs and interests of all categories and groups of people in the society. As a matter of fact, in December 2004, the Ivorian public Radiodiffusion Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) changed from the status of ''public limited company'' to a ''state company''[2].

In Burkina Faso, the very first state daily newspaper in the country's political history was created in April 1984. The daily 'Sidwaya' which means in the national language Mooré "the truth has come"[3] had for principal mission: information, propaganda, agitation and the permanent mobilization of the people for the development and consolidation of governmental actions. In 1999, the government decided to transform the general management of Sidwaya into a Public Establishment. According to its former general director Ibrahim SAKANDE, it is undoubtedly *"the gigantic result of men and women who believed in what they did, and who still believe in what they do: to inform, to raise awareness, and contribute to nation building through laborious participation in the emergence of a democratic culture in the service of development"*[4].

Despite the particular circumstances of these new reforms in a global West African context, public newspapers, radio stations and television channels are symptomatic of the trampling of the public media reform in West Africa and indicative of the persistent political struggle for control of information. The preponderance of executive power in the public media in West Africa is also perceptible through the hierarchization of information, which most often begins with official activities or institutional news and governmental communications. For instance the Burkinabe national television devotes most often the first 15 minutes of the breaking news to the presidential agenda (Balima and Duchenne, 2005). Beyond this constant subservience to political and institutional powers in the field of information, the public media, deprived of adequate means, struggle to offer viewers a fictional program that allows citizens to rediscover images of their societies. Also, television in West African context remains characterized by hegemony of imported images, especially from Europe and America. This can be illustrated via the huge consumption of European, American or Brazilian TV series.

4. Media Security, Full Surveillance and Repression in West Africa

The emergence of private media groups in West Africa has generally met with violent repression. When media professionals dared to question or reveal the criminal activities and corruption of certain members of high-ranking circles, they were terribly threatened, severely punished, jailed or even murdered (Freedom House, 2017). The assassinations of distinguished journalists such as Norbert Zongo in 1998 in Burkina Faso, Deyda Heydara in 2004 in Gambia, Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon in 2013 in Mali, illustrate realistically the severity of repression in West Africa. In 1998 for instance, the report of an independent commission on the 'Zongo affair' concluded that:

Norbert Zongo was assassinated for strictly political reasons, because he practiced committed investigative journalism. He defended a democratic ideal and participated, within the framework of his independent newspaper, in the fight for respect for human rights and justice against bad governance of public affairs and against impunity.

Some international media associations, such as the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, estimated that around 200 journalists have been killed in Africa over the past 20 years. Most of them have been victims of wars.

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[2]   Governmental Decree No 2004-678 of December 24, 2004, relating to the transformation of RTI.

[3]   Interview with Rabanki-Boubakr Zida, General director of Les Editions Sidwaya in 2016.

[4]   Interview with Ibrahim SAKANDE, former General Director of Sidwaya, in September 2015.

Repressive laws have severely hampered the rights of journalists in the African continent. Except South Africa where the post-apartheid transition has been accompanied by a complete overhaul of media law, the media pluralism has prompted only very minor legal and political reforms. A study estimated in 2005 that the legislative and political straitjacket imposed on the media in most countries of the continent was so restrictive that *"the need for a critical examination and major transformations of the legislative and political framework in which the media operate the continent cannot be overstated"* (Ogola, 2015). In consequence, violent attacks and restrictive laws slowed media growth and reduced its effectiveness. Meanwhile, the professional shortcomings and the financial precariousness of the press organs contributed to diminish its scope.

By contrast, the African Union and regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as the 11 members of the Regional Conference on the Great Lakes have all adopted protocols and declarations in favour of press freedom and freedom of opinion. And while most governments in member countries still do not respect these protocols, civil society groups are mobilizing organizations such as the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Public Information, and the African Commission on Human Rights to promote awareness of media rights. Other associations, such as the Media Foundation for West Africa, denounce violations of the journalists' rights to the new ECOWAS Regional Court of Community Justice (Freedom House, 2017).

More than any other factor, economic considerations threaten the survival of media pluralism in West Africa. With the exception of independent media groups such as 'Notre Voie' and 'Soir Info' in Ivory Coast, 'L'Observateur Paalga' and 'Le pays' in Burkina Faso, 'Info-Matin' and 'Le Républicain' in Mali, the 'Multimedia Group' in Ghana, most private independent news organizations are small and fragile enterprises, often threatened with downsizing and even bankruptcy. With the growing dependence of the media on the market economy, their independence is increasingly threatened. Dominant companies and corrupted bosses are trying to impose their hegemony on the private media organizations.

5. The Place of Mobile Journalism in West African Media Ecosystem

Despite the extraordinary proliferation of media companies in Africa, Professor Guy Berger of the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies in South Africa estimated in 2007 that Africans *"were the populations least well served in terms of dissemination of information"*. For him, African states have few journalists per capita if we compare the continent to other regions of the world. With one journalist per 1,300 inhabitants, South Africa is at the top of the ranking. In Ghana, there is one journalist for every 11,000 people, and one for every 18,000 people in Cameroon. Zimbabwe, with one journalist for 34,000, is ahead of Ethiopia, which has one journalist for 99,000 people. Over the decades, the shortage worsens.

However, mobile journalism and, more broadly, citizen journalism has contributed to a "radical personalisation of news-gathering" (Goggin, 2006). As a potential newsgathering device, mobile phones contributed considerably to a wide dissemination of information through the populace in West African context specifically. Nowadays, it is almost impossible to find a teenager who does not have a mobile phone, a smartphone and/or an IPad. The mobile phone is obviously the best tool for multiple services such as receiving information and posting messages on social networks (Ouedraogo, 2020). Very recently the irrational fear of losing or not having access to one's mobile phone has been officially recognized as a psychiatric pathology (Bragazzi and Giovanni 2014). It is called nomophobia. Thus, the use of mobile phones by new generation revealed ''how ubiquitous these devices have become''. It means that Mobile Journalism has become an essential means of communication in the transmission of information nowadays. Francis Balle appreciates it in these terms:

"The success (…) was immediate and, with it (the mobile phone) throughout the decades of its expansion, many improvements appeared: rationalization of the design of communication and networks; empowerment; technological changes finally, related to the introduction of electronics, which would profoundly change the telephony''.

Therefore, Mobile Journalism is one of the surest methods of popularizing information in West Africa, a guarantee of an anchoring of democracy in the "public sphere". As Castells (2010) put it, *"mobile telephony has moved from being the technology for a privileged few, to essentially a mainstream technology"*.

West African countries are on the move and seek to take their place in the technological, political and social revolution represented by the emergence of new media in the digital age; despite the difficulties and the cost of access to the Internet, and despite the political reluctance of authoritarian authorities who take a dim view on independent news companies.

In his cult book *"We, The Media"*, Dan Gillmor describes how, in the context of an industrialized country like the United States, technology enabled participatory and democratized media, a "trustworthy information ecosystem".

In the West African context press freedom remains a mirage, and democratization a utopia in many countries. Talking about the issue of citizen journalism, Guy Berger claimed that *"We want our journalists to become citizens, and not only, but also our citizens to become journalists as it is generally understood."*[5] The message from Guy Berger, master of ceremonies of Highway Africa[6], is clear:

"Too many African countries treat their people as subjects, not as citizens. Too many African countries are still subject to dictatorships. Too many African countries are still living in the dark age of official reporting. Africans, like others, have a right to media that support and enable the affirmation of citizenship, which allows them to be both journalists and citizens. Journalists are citizens; they are two sides of the same coin."

Despite the difficult conditions, West Africa is indeed on the eve of an explosion of new media, the premises of which can be perceived everywhere, with the appearance of bloggers (such as Théophile Kouamouo, famous blogger in Ivory Coast and Bassératou Kindo, feminist blogger in Burkina Faso).

As everywhere else, the arrival of the Internet has shaken up the West African media landscape and the independent media news companies. However, the digital media has grown slowly, in a regional context where, in June 2014, just 4.4% of the population had access to the Internet. The computer park remains limited and the electrical network is often non-existent or deficient. Hence, the new form of mobile journalism implemented in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso respectively in 2013 and 2014 has become a means of democratization of information in this era of mobile phone predominance.

6. Methodology: Mobile Flash News in West Africa

The French sociologist Stoetzel (1980) defined the methodology as *"knowledge resulting from a reflection on the practice of research"*. The current study about the exploration a new form of Mobile Journalism in West Africa is purely qualitative. Hence, in my investigations, I focused on interviews with mobile news consumers, mobile journalists, Media owners, media regulation body's representatives, etc. in order to decipher the topic. In fact, every research strategy has its specific method. Thus, using qualitative research design for this study attempts to find answers about why and how people use mobile phones as a privileged device to get information in West Africa. Therefore, it is based on interviews, opinions, experiences, focus groups discussions, etc. Indeed, qualitative research method is generally used for phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, and narrative research. This method furnishes rigorous information about human attitudes.

Furthermore, it is relevant to specify in this research that Mobile Journalism is one of the surest means of popularizing information (in terms of accessibility), a guarantee of anchoring democracy in the public sphere. Then, for a good analysis of this topic, I will examine the real scope of this information system before having a critical look at the assessment made by its audience. Later on, I will open a window on the conditions of works of news producers before discussing the feedbacks and complaints made by the targeted audiences. Thence, in order to understand this topic in a phenomenological angle of view, it is necessary to analyse it qualitatively. This type of analysis will permit to provide in-depth information about how and why people are most interested in consuming news through mobile phones.

To sum up, the use of qualitative research design has considerably increased the credibility and the scientific value of this study and proves objectively that Mobile Journalism is a real means of democratization of information in West African context dominated by the preponderance of New Medias apparatuses.

Since its launch in Burkina Faso, more than 600,000 people have subscribed to the Sidwaya Mobile product. In Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire) the number of users reached one million in 2019 with FratMat Mobile. This facilitated significantly the access to information of lots of citizens in these two countries. With mobile phone, it is short-term information that translates into the connection between citizens and immediate flash news. People instantly and individually receive information that has just happened or is happening in real time. Therefore, these techniques allow an easy integration between audiences and decision makers; taking into account individual interests vis-à-vis the actions of politicians, synonym of a strengthened democracy.

The mobile phone being an essential and indispensable tool for modern societies, the individuals are in direct and permanent contact with their mobile phones. The sociologist, Lejealle (2009) examined the nexus that exists between the use, the sociability and the interaction of mobile telephony. In her researches she highlights the relationships between mobile communication functions, media contents and mobile telephony. The classic mobile communication functions—calls, MMS and SMS—are thus in the foreground. Hence, three (03) factors influence consumers' choice of mobile

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[5]   Guy Berger is the head of the faculty of journalism at Rhodes University and "guru" of Highway Africa.

[6]   Highway Africa is a multiyear collaborative research and teaching project that explores the past, present, and future of the trans-African highway system.

products: The context, the medium and the content. We can see that the fact of obtaining information via the mobile phone does not affect the use of other media—the print newspaper, radio, television or the Internet—since the use of the mobile phone intervenes, most of the time, when the individual is away from the house or does not have access to the internet connection.

In her book entitled "Le Téléphone Portable ET Nous", Corinne MARTIN (2204) tells us that:

"Adults have associated the emergency with the mobile phone; the latter fulfils a reassurance function in the face of emergency situations". Thus, the utilitarian logic was built around reinsurance. Then, the mobile phone becomes an essential device for everyone, including low users because it works in a kind of symbolic efficiency: it is important to always have it with you "just in case (…)".

From this perspective, it is necessary to analyse the new possibilities offered by this technical device, the mobile phone. For Martin (2007), the cell phone can turn out to be a real zealous informer in the public sphere.

The current study on the analysis of the dissemination of information via mobile phones in West Africa focuses on a specific population. To constitute the study sample, I made a rational choice. The rational sampling method is a method of selecting a sample by which the representativeness of the sample is ensured by a reasoned approach. The field of study is the following:

- *The global population*: Literate people, made up of civil servants, University students, etc. This audience is the most educated and interested in Mobile flash news consumption. It is therefore directly concerned by this study.

- *The target population:* Mobile journalists, Media regulatory bodies, Customers subscribed to FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile via Airtel, Telmob, Orange CI, Moov and MTN networks.

- The sample size covers a population of 65 people. It is made up of 50 target people (Sidwaya Mobile and FratMat Mobile subscribers), 10 mobile journalists in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, 04 resource people (media managers) and finally one (01) person from the media regulatory body in Burkina Faso (Conseil Supérieur de la Communication). For a better visibility of the constitution of this sample, we detailed its distribution in the Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample Target

Variables		Customers (Subscribes)	Media Regulatory Body	Media Managers	Mobile Journalists	Total
Sampling rate	*T =*	0,0005%	50%	100%	100%	
Sample size	*N=*	50	01	04	10	**65**

7. Mobile Journalism in West African Context: Case of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso

In October 2006, David Youant, President of the Online Media Professionals Network in Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), created the private news agency called "Alerte Infos"[7]. It was the first agency in West Africa specialized in the production and distribution of news by SMS, on mobile applications for Smartphones and the web. Legally incorporated as a press company and recognized by all regulatory bodies, the agency has several offices in Africa.

In Ivory Coast, the daily governmental newspaper "*Fraternité Matin*" was the first to try the experience of disseminating instantaneous information via mobile phones. Thus, a new product called "FratMat Mobile" or "FratMat Express" has been created. This state of fact enchanted the Burkinabe's governmental newspaper "Editions Sidwaya" which also set up the mobile version of information called "Sidwaya Mobile" in April 2014. Two months later, the daily private newspapers '*L'Observateur Paalga', 'Le Pays' and 'Burkina24'* launched their mobile information version.

The product "Sidwaya Mobile" was the result of a partnership between two Ivorian and Burkinabe institutions. First, the idea came from the "FratMat Mobile" project, developed by Barthélemy Kouame, Managing Director of REELCOM communications and publishing company. Thus, for the installation of "Sidwaya Mobile" project in Burkina Faso, a partnership was signed in July 2013 by the representatives of the communication agencies REELCOM (managed by Barthélemy Kouame from Ivory Coast) and IMAGIC Communication (of Désiré Bakyono from Burkina Faso). This was obviously a project to experiment the method of disseminating information through mobile phone operators.

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[7]   Interview with Barthélemy Kouame, Managing Director of REELCOM communications and publishing company in 2016.

[8]   Clermont (2015). L'importance du téléphone portable. Available online at: http://www.ac-clermont.fr/viescolaire

The partnership between the two press groups, 'Les Editions Sidwaya' and 'Fraternité Matin', was the basis for the introduction of mobile journalism in West Africa. According to the first officials, it was in the desire to *"continue to inform all populations in their diversity wherever they are"* that this new informative product was created. In Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast it was a new string that 'Sidwaya' and 'Fraternité Matin' had just put to their bow.

8. Description of FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile

In order to have access to the informational contents of 'FratMat Mobile' and 'Sidwaya Mobile', people need to possess just a mobile phone or, if necessary, a smartphone with a subscription to the Airtel or Telmob networks. The subscription package (daily, weekly or monthly) is done by entering the code *334# for Sidwaya Mobile in Burkina Faso and #129# for FratMat Mobile in Ivory Coast. In technical language, this is the Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) code dedicated to the mobile news product. Then, the amount of the subscription is deducted from the communication credit of the subscriber. For the consultation (news check-up), after entering the USSD code, the sections will appear with serial numbers. Thus, it is up to the subscriber to choose their section to consult the related information. As a result, just as with the subscription, payment is made by debiting the communication credit available to the customer. Hence, any user who does not have sufficient credits can neither subscribe to a subscription package, nor check-up relevant news.

Once subscribed, most of the news is summarized in newsletters, and then sent to customers as "flash SMS". The subscribed customer is then alerted each time that a new piece of information is sent. The customer can therefore consult the information published in real time and archived contents on his mobile phone.

9. Structure of Mobile Flash News

Flash news can be defined as being short and succinct information. In contrast to other editorial genres (report, interview, investigation, etc.), the flash is a short text, written in a few lines (ten maximum) reporting facts without detailing them. It gives in three or four sentences very concise information, without title, which necessarily answers the questions: who, what, when, where and sometimes why. Flash news is rarely alone; it is presented in a column of several different others. When it has a title, it becomes a "story". In another frame, it will be called a "column".

All the textual symbols and written accentuations are not supported by FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile platforms. In editorial style, therefore, it is necessary to avoid French or Spanish accented letters (such as é, ê, ô, ö, è, ç, etc.), apostrophes and hyphens, as well as percentages, question marks, and quotation marks. The latter can be replaced by brackets which, for their part, do not undergo deformation at the level of the mobile platforms. Otherwise, the other symbols listed above automatically change to unreadable symbols (like: ?, #, &,%, etc.) to indicate that the mentioned symbols could not be decoded by the platform and, therefore, are not recognized. The writing style of FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile's flash news takes into account three basic elements: the title, the introduction, the body of the article, and finally the section of the news. To illustrate it, this is an example of Mobile Flash news published by Sidwaya Mobile:

"Arrest of fraudsters in Burkina Faso: The Boulmiougou brigade dismantled on March 22 a network of counterfeiters specialized in the preparation of false official documents and diplomas. The news was made public on Wednesday during a press briefing. Nikiema paul, Koalga Moumouni and Kabore Issa are the three accomplices who were arrested. Captain Arsene YE specified that these thugs were able to extort more than 10 million FCFA through this activity. Sidwaya mobile, Section Business"

Interview: To conduct the interviews for the mobile platforms, only the most relevant part of the interviewee's words will be retained. In doing so, the journalist opens brackets after the introductive sentence—the title—(instead of quotes), then summarizes the essence of the interviewee's intervention in some five hundred (500) characters. The example below is an illustration an interview in FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile:

"Hajj 2015: (A report on the pilgrimage to Mecca was submitted to the Minister's Council to reflect on the organization of the hajj. We have identified all the shortcomings and we are making improvements. It is a matter of the travel agencies, reduction of the cost of transport for pilgrims, etc. The objective is to go as late as possible to return as soon as possible), declared the Minister of Security, Auguste Barry on Wednesday in Ouagadougou. FratMat Mobile/Sidwaya Mobile, section Business."

The sections of Mobile flash news: Like any type of information medium or conventional newspaper, FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile platforms are structured into different sections that offer diverse contents to subscribed customers. There are a total of seven sections namely:

- *Politics*: This section takes into account the activities of political parties, partisan statements by certain civil society organizations, speeches by political leaders, etc.

- *Business*: This is the flagship section of the platform. It gathers several sectors that could be the subject of other headings. That is the case for instance of subjects relating to education, health, transport, security, agriculture, etc.

- *Economy*: This is a section reserved for articles relating to financial and budgetary matters, etc. in short, anything relating to the economy.

- *Environment*: As its name suggests, any article relating to the environment (forest, climate, water, soil, etc.) is classified in this section.

- *Sport*: This section is devoted to articles related to national and international sports activities or events.

- *Culture*: Cultural and artistic events are discussed and posted on this section.

- *International*: This section brings together all the articles of international news (North Africa, Europe, USA, Eastern World, and everywhere in the world).

10. Method of Dissemination of Information

FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile's platforms are designed in such a way that the information received from the mobile telephony network 'Telmob' differs from that published through 'Airtel', 'Orange CI', 'MTN', and 'Moov' telephony networks. Hence, it goes without saying that these telephony networks do not have the same operating mode.

The operating mode of the operator Airtel: With Airtel, the information does not come in full to the subscriber. Nevertheless, the customer receives all the information of the day, but each 'flash news' published comes with a signal to the subscriber. This teaser is made in a single sentence, followed by incentive words such as: *"more information on Sidwaya mobile *334# Section Politics/Society/Sport/Business, etc."* For example, mobile flash news teasing looks like that:

"JUSTICE COURT: The union of clerks in Burkina Faso and the national union of justice officials went on strike for a month. For more info:*334#Sidwaya Mobile Section Society".

Clearly, this system consists of inviting the subscriber to make a new subscription and check the information on Airtel network system. It is also important to mention that the posting of information on the Airtel platform, as well as on Orange CI, MTN, and Moov platforms, is done by the REELCOM agency located in Ivory Coast.

The operating mode of the operator Telmob: Regarding the subscription from 'Telmob' telephony network operator, the subscriber receives ten mobile flash news daily without teasing. These are the ones deemed relevant which are selected and posted on Telmob platform by the local Mobile journalists. However, this method does not give subscribers the flexibility to access all the articles of the day. It is a passive operation which consists of receiving ten informational messages daily according to the news relevance. As a precaution, a leeway of at least two pieces of information is reserved until 4:00 pm, in case there are major unforeseen events during the rest of the day.

11. Results of my Investigation

This part of my investigative research attempts to analyse the attitude of mobile flash news consumers (FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile subscribers) and to determine their assessments of the operation of this informational service. Thus, it will be a question of identifying the difficulties that hamper the proper functioning of this new informational approach. This will help me to make further suggestions to fix it. Consequently, the qualitative data analysed come from a questionnaire survey and focus group interviews of 60 people, including 50 people with a subscription package for news via mobile phone and ten mobile journalists from Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. I also conducted interviews with resource persons (media managers) and media regulatory body representatives.

In doing so, I observed the interest of citizens for information emanating from mobile phones, their level of knowledge on the pricing method, and the reproaches and complaints that they make to the initiators of the system. Likewise, I *deemed necessary to approach media managers, resource persons and control groups, and Mobile journalists of Sidwaya and FratMat Mobile in order to obtain their opinions about this new informative method.*

Thus, I identified the following characteristics of the targeted audience: the fringe of the population most subscribed to Mobile flash news, the socioeconomic and professional situation of subscribers, their age, their level of education,

their proficiency about the functioning of FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile, and finally the criticisms labelled against this new strategy of Mobile Journalism in West African media ecosystem.

12. Media Managers and Media Regulatory Bodies' Perspectives

The opinions of these representatives samples about the new form of 'mobile journalism' is somewhat mixed. Without obscuring the possible risks with which this type of journalism is confronted, the press owners who manage the mobile flash news productions, as well as the media regulatory bodies, recognize the need of enlarging the practice of such journalism in West Africa. Thus, the first responsible in charge of 'Editions Sidwaya' in Burkina Faso, Rabanki Abou-Bâkr Zida, could not be more objective about the importance of this method of disseminating information for the Burkinabè population. For him, *"this is a new dynamic that the major press group of the country has just injected into its policy of democratizing information for the benefit of all social strata"*. The Managing Director of Editions Sidwaya nevertheless identifies some difficulties that hinder the proper functioning of this new information system. These difficulties are rather linked to the delay in disseminating information and the lack of knowledge about the new informational approach after more than five years of existence. As for Hyacinthe Sanou, head of the editorial department of "L'Obs-SMS", this new information strategy has strengthened the West African media landscape in terms of providing information services to grassroots citizens. According to him, *"this service aims to make information accessible at all levels. It promotes real-time and continuous news on mobile phones, allowing subscribers to be up to date with the latest news"*. In the same vein, the editorial director of Sidwaya, Enock Kindo, added:

"The objective of Sidwaya Mobile is to allow subscribers, if not having the daily Sidwaya, to have the gift of ubiquity. Sidwaya Mobile allows them to be up-to-date with national and international news instantly and continuously every day. It is therefore to carry the information wherever there are subscribers".

However, the Superior Council of Communication (the media regulatory body) expresses doubts about the credibility of the information emanating from mobile phones. For the General Director of media observation and studies in Burkina Faso, Jean Paul TOE, the speed required by this kind of Mobile Journalism can sometimes lead the producers (journalists) to disseminate false information or encourage the circulation of fake news. He takes the example of 'Alerte infos' in Ivory Coast with which the Superior Council had lots of difficulties in terms of regulation, since they were the first to introduce this mechanism into the control system in Burkina Faso. For TOE, the source verification and fact-checking process can be biased due to the news instantaneity. Nevertheless, the Superior Council recognizes the importance of this type of journalism in terms of news popularization and democratization of information in West African context.

Regarding the regulation mechanism, Jean Paul TOE asserts that there is no specific procedure for evaluating information via mobile. But legally the texts give the competence to the Superior Council of Communication to regulate the information whatever the channel used. Given the novelty of the concept, the media observation department of the regulatory body is in the process of integrating the method of regulating 'mobile flash news' into its control system.

13. Identification and Attitude of Mobile Flash News Subscribers

Table 2 gives an overview of the socio-professional characteristics of FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile subscribers. Also, it gives us more visibility on the targeted audience of mobile flash news consumers. As this table shows, most of the subscribers encountered are high school and university students. A total of 50 people who subscribed to Sidwaya Mobile and FratMat Mobile have been surveyed. As a matter of fact, there are 64% of students, 26% of civil servants, 08% of people employed in the private sector and 02% for those in the informal sector.

Table 2: Socio-Professional Characteristics of Subscribers		
Categorization of Customers	**Number of Subscribers**	**Frequency**
Students	32	64%
Public sector agents	13	26%
Private sector agents	04	08%
Other	**01**	**02%**

The numerical superiority of the rate of students—as presented in thisTable 2 above compared to workers can be justified by the fact that they have a clear desire to read the daily information, but do not have enough financial means to buy the print newspapers. In point of fact, some people affirmed that:

"The print newspaper is not for everyone. With only 25Franc CFA (less than 0.05US dollar) we can have all the information of the day, that's ideal. We regularly subscribe to Sidwaya mobile's flash news because we can't buy the daily print newspapers every time. It is ten times more espensive".

Moreover, 56% of subscribers are between 18 and 25 years old, 18% are between 26 and 35 years old, 24% between 36 and 45 years old and 02% are between 46 years old and over. This can be justified by the fact that most of them are students. The observation is that young people use mobile phones much more than other categories of people because they are fond of the latest generations of ICT and make them their privileged tools of information. Some of them argued that: *"The cell phones have made life easier a lot. Thanks to the mobile phones, it is easier to manage your time at work while keeping in touch with everything that is happening around the world".* A young trader whose age varies between 18 and 25 years old confides:

"I do not have time to read all the contents of a newspaper during my working hours, whereas the information of Sidwaya mobile is the summary of the same news treated in the printed newspaper".

Obviously, subscribers do not use to archive flash news messages from Sidwaya Mobile or FratMat Mobile. Only 44% of them feel the necessity of keeping the information received to read it again later, against 56% who find it too cumbersome. The former uses the archived information as evidence when discussing with friends, while the latter prefers to delete it immediately so as not to clutter their phones with lots of messages. In terms of paid-consultation, more than half of subscribers sometimes devote some of their free time to it. 52% of them regularly consult the different sections of Sidwaya Mobile and FratMat Mobile.
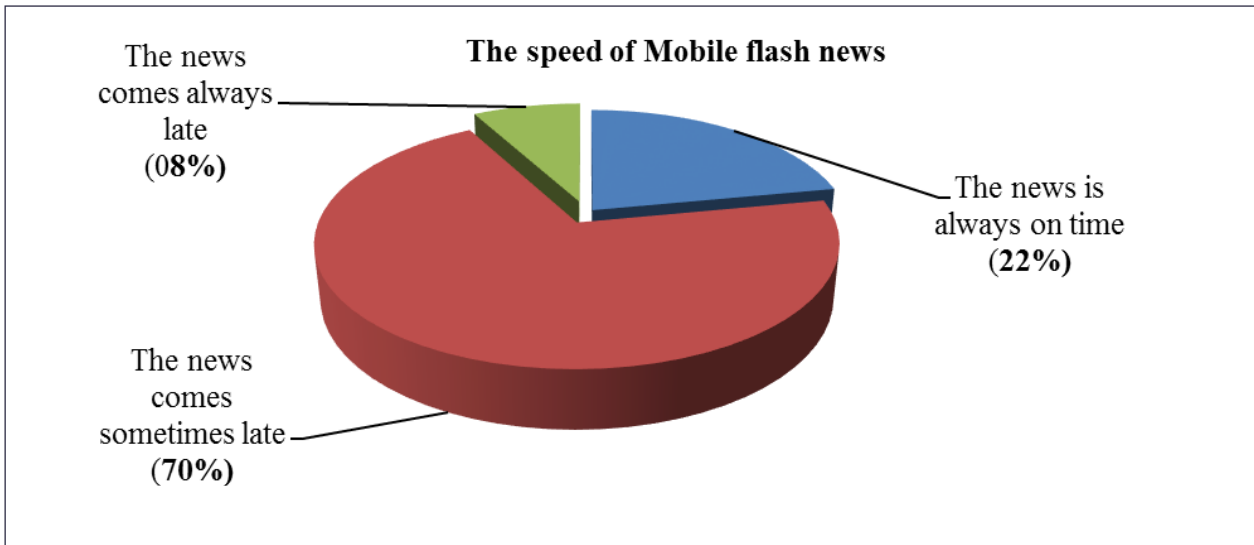
14. Audience's Satisfaction

The results of Table 3present the level of knowledge and satisfaction of subscribers about the pricing methods for both subscription and consultation. In this regard, it appears that subscribers are most often satisfied (60% of them) with the prices charged for the subscription. On the other hand, when it comes to paid-consultations, they are less satisfied. Indeed, 64% of the people surveyed negatively appreciate the tariffing for the consultation of the sections of the mobile platform, against 36% who approve it. These subscribers find the prices too much high.

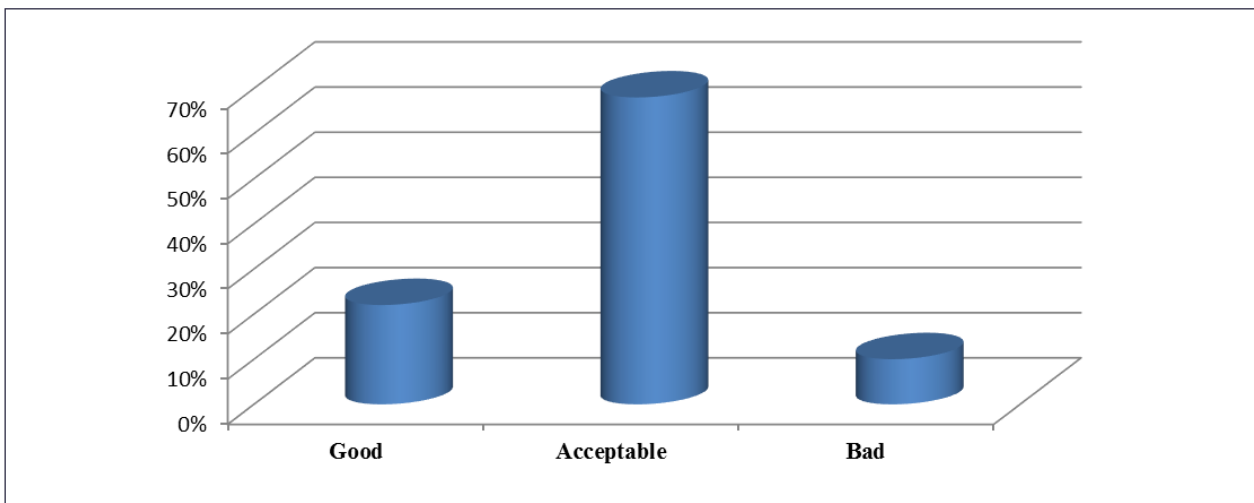| Table 3: Subscribers' Knowledge And Satisfaction About The Tariffing		
Variables & Indicators	**Number of Respondents**	**Frequency**
Knowledge and satisfaction about the tariffing mode	Yes : 32	64%
	No : 18	36%
Satisfaction about the pricing	Subscription : 30/50	60%
	Paid-Consultation: 18/50	**36%**

However, the level of knowledge of the pricing method by subscribers is low. This could have repercussions on their assessment. We recorded 36% of people who say they completely ignore the different pricing methods of Sidwaya Mobile and FratMat Mobile, compared to 64% who have some knowledge about it. The 36% of these respondents subscribe without first looking to know the pricing methods because they believe that this could not exceed the billing made for ordinary messages.

15. Satisfaction About the Speed of Mobile Flash News

Figure 1 is a representation of subscribers' appreciation of how quickly they receive information from FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile. Concretely, the pie chart (Figure 1) reveals that the majority of readers (i.e., 70% of Mobile flash news subscribers) receive information late most often. Despite the status of instantaneous media recognized by most of the respondents, they deplore the almost permanent slowness in receiving mobile flash news. Amongst the 50 people approached, only 22% positively appreciate the speed of the system, 08% of them said they have never received the information in real time and 70% receive it late most often. Indeed, generally the information always reaches them late (at night hours). Some people say they go whole days without receiving any information even though they have been billed. Figure 2 shows the assessment of the method of disseminating information made by the audience.

The speed of Mobile flash news

The news comes always late (08%)

The news is always on time (22%)

The news comes sometimes late (70%)

Figure 1: Assessment of the Speed of Mobile Information

Figure 2: Assessment of the Method of Disseminating Information

Through the results contained in this diagram, it appears clearly that only 22% of our respondents positively appreciate the method of distributing information from FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile. As we can see in the graph, the majority of them (68%) find it acceptable, while 10% believe that the system has failed in its informative role. They criticize the service for never respecting the instantaneous aspect of information required by this form of mobile journalism system.

16. The Mobile Journalists' Perspectives

As a reminder, as part of this research, I approached ten Mobile journalists from Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso—including four journalists from FratMat Mobile staff and six journalists from Sidawaya Mobile - to collect their opinion on this new method of disseminating information. This allows me to see that almost all journalists at FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile (100%) receive complaints from subscribers. These complaints are mainly related to the delay in receiving the daily information, the dissemination of outdated news and sometimes spelling mistakes in the writing style.

While the Mobile flash news subscribers complain about the quality of the service, the mobile journalists on the other side are facing difficult working conditions. The results of our investigation indicate that the mobile journalists do not have good working conditions. Concretely, 70% of them admit that the working conditions are acceptable and 30% disapprove vehemently these conditions. For the latter, the journalist encounters enormous difficulties in collecting,

processing and disseminating information through Mobile telephony operators. Also, some problems related to internet connection and difficulties in obtaining press kits during some events were among other problems raised by many Mobile journalists. There is therefore a close relationship between working conditions and the quality of the service of FratMat and Sidwaya Mobile. As a matter of fact, if journalists are not well equipped, they will not be able to meet all the requirements of the service.

17. Discussion

As the author Helmore (1995) put it, *"the proper functioning of democracy depends on the participation of citizens, and this participation can only be real and valid if the citizens are well informed (...) Only a public well informed by an active and conscientious press will be able to exercise its voting rights and privileges and participate effectively in political life"*. Thus, with media pluralism and the popularization of information on a large scale through mobile telephony operators in West Africa, all citizens will be able to *"participate effectively in political life"*. In other words, this new method of disseminating information via mobile phones is essential for West African states. This study is therefore intended to be exploratory in order to challenge the whole community to take a different look at the presence of this communication tool with multiple uses in the West African media landscape.

From the expansion of ICTs' view and the proliferation of media outlets in the African media ecosystem, it is necessary to adopt new operating modes of information dissemination to conquer the audience. Indeed, we are witnessing what Balle (2006) described as *"audience fragmentation"*, where each type of media finds itself with a smaller market share.

Criticism from readers revolves around the late distribution of information to subscribers, the ignorance of pricing methods, and the inability to unsubscribe from the mobile flash news service. According to the subscribers, the automatic renewal of the subscription is often done without their consent. For some observers, FratMat Mobile and Sidwaya Mobile must review the pricing for the paid-consultations in order to allow subscribers to get access to all the sections of the mobile journalism platform. Also, the fact of limiting the number of flash news share to ten posts per day should be reorganized and increased. Still, some people deplore the lack of information at the international level and the proliferation of news dealing with symposia, workshops and training seminars. Some respondents also pointed out the length of sentences and the complexity of certain writing styles that make it difficult to be understood. They also blamed some spelling errors sometimes found in the news.

As a result, the audience needs relevant and fresh information, written in a readable style and distributed in real time. This corresponds to the slogan of Sidwaya Mobile: '*Receive real time and continuous information on your mobile phone'*. It is therefore up to the first responsible of mobile flash news services to make a real improvement in terms of production and distribution of information.

On the other side of the spectrum, mobile journalists expect much more amelioration from the mobile media managers. Almost all of the journalists stated that they face enormous difficulties of all kinds. In general, they would like to have connection keys or, better yet, IPads and good smartphones with internet connection in order to be able to disseminate information in real time. Some journalists also raised the issue of salary treatment which, in their opinion, is not commensurate with the tasks performed. The lack of material resources for reporting (Dictaphones, transport vehicles, the low speed of the internet connection, etc.) are also big obstacles in the work of journalists.

Furthermore, the concept and writing style of mobile flash news does not have everyone's buy-in. Even if the promoters do not run out of arguments to justify the usefulness of mobile information, it should be noted that it encounters enormous difficulties of operation. It should be noted that whatever the speed and efficiency of mobile journalists, if the quality of the internet connection is faulty, the flash news will always be late. To this end, the editorial director of Editions Sidwaya, Enock KINDO, confirmed that:

"The difficulties are of several types: to the insufficiency of staff, there are also material and technical failures (such as the lack of connection keys and others) which make it difficult for the editorial staff. At Telmob, we have registered complaints from some subscribers who receive Mobile news flashes late at night, which is not normal".

Moreover, the head of IMAGIC Communication agency, Désiré BAKYONO, believes that:

"New initiatives or new concepts cannot lack difficulties. Currently, information is something quite marginal. Even at the level of mobile journalists, we find it difficult to make them accept that this form of information can be real journalism in its own right, that they can make a career in it, and be more fulfilled than in conventional journalism".

As I also mentioned above, the investigations also revealed that complaints are observed from subscribers. Therefore, it is undoubtedly because this new form of Mobile journalism is struggling to prosper in the West African context,

regarding the aforementioned obstacles, which are due to multiple factors. Therefore, it would be fruitful to make some suggestions. This could help managers to overcome certain difficulties encountered.

18. Suggestions

This new form of Mobile Journalism adopted by Fraternité Matin in Ivory Coast and Les Editions Sidwaya in Burkina Faso is a mechanism that contributes significantly to reducing the digital divide in West Africa. Indeed, we are in a context of globalization, characterized by digital developments, and these apparatuses are essential tools in terms of popularization and democratization of information. Hyacinthe Sanou, the coordinator of 'Obs-SMS', testified that: *"Mobile information is the new dairy cow for media in West Africa. Responsiveness is an option that the print journal does not have. This is the small difference between these two entities; otherwise it is approximately the same information which is processed. The two entities complement each other and it is normal that the evolution of the printed press is incorporated into ICTs to provide a new form of information".*

In the West African context, mobile information has a lot of advantages. However, many obstacles are limiting this process of disseminating information in developing countries, such as Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. Regarding the various criticisms made by Mobile flash news' subscribers and the difficulties mentioned by mobile journalists, it is necessary to suggest possible solutions that could improve the quality of the service.

Hence, for the proper functioning of Mobile flash news system, the managers will have to:

- Increase the number and the quality of flash news per day;
- Reconfigure the platform to integrate unrecognized characters and symbols (quote marks, question marks, accentuations, etc.) to facilitate reading and avoid certain spelling errors;
- Make the internet connection fluid and available for mobile journalists;
- Encourage mobile telephony operators to be reactive and share information in real time;
- Initiate communicative actions on the product, with the aim of continuing to inform readers about the functioning of the service. This could not only help improving the image of the service, but also build trust with loyal customers.

19. Conclusion

Today more than two decades ago, we live in a networked world, made possible by the unprecedented development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Everyone has their own device whether connected to the Internet or not. Now, it is possible to have many opportunities in relation to the ambitions of the new media users. Thus, the social media applications, the large global communications groups, the exceptional interaction platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Blogs, etc. quickly became essential tools for young generation of the digital age. These platforms offer several identifiable features but are not for the most part basic. Consequently, new forms of mobile journalism, like mobile flash news, enhance freedom of expression by promoting the free flow of information. It gives the public the right to participate in the animation of public space, synonymous with strengthening democracy. Thence, *"civil society will be consolidated for all"*. In this regard, US Senator William BORAH asserted that:

"In the absence of a free press and freedom of expression, any form of body that has the appearance of a free institution is a sham. If the press is not free, if the word is not independent, and without constraint, if the mind is chained or reduced to impotence by fear, no matter your regime is, you are a subject, not a citizen" (Kirtley, 2011).

However, by facilitating public access to information, mobile flash news helps to forge conscious and responsible citizens in the public sphere.

In addition, this informational process of Mobile Journalism responds to one of the French researcher CLAUDE Jean-Bertrand's principles of M*A*R*S (Method for Ensuring Social Responsibility of Journalists). Indeed, M*A*R*S are non-governmental means that call for the social responsibility of journalists. And these non-state means are aimed at improving public media service. In fact, when the citizens have an easy access (access to real-time and continuous information) to media news, they can thus assess journalists' works accordingly.

At the end of this investigation, it should be mentioned that today, the importance of mobile journalism is well established. That is why there is no social sector where the mobile phone is not used. And its use has been diversified. Talking about the importance and usefulness of mobile journalism in the dissemination of information, some French telecommunication specialists argue that:

"The mobile phone offers immediacy, simultaneity, and actions at a distance. It expresses speed. This new flexibility allows efficiency in several areas at the same time: the user multiplies, juggles with different situations. In short, the

mobile becomes the tool of performance. It is a time machine. The thoughtful and organized management of time shows that, far from being the victims of the tool, we are in a position to cunning with it to optimize our relationship to time".

Beyond the practical importance of mobile journalism, this research on the method of disseminating of mobile flash news provided answers to a number of questions raised at the outset. Thus, the results of this study highlighted both the shortcomings and the advantages of using the mobile phone for disseminating information. Eventually, even if this new information method encounters operational difficulties, the fact remains that it favours a real popularization and democratization of information in West Africa. In other words, this process of disseminating information is an opportunity which facilitates people's access to information.

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